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bringing them into the world; of helping siblings because of the kind things they have done; of loving children so that they will care for them when they are old [11]—but they do condition how and when such sentiments will be expressed. It is difficult to recall any instance of a Bang Chaner being caught in a situation of which *he was aware of* a conflict between satisfying his own desires and fulfilling his obligations to kin, so it is difficult to say which sentiment would ordinarily take precedence in his own mind; but to an observer, it would seem that the former would most likely have priority. (See Hanks and Phillips 1961 for evidence in support of this point.) [12] Actually, most villagers seem eminently successful in keeping the sentiments apart, which helps to account in part for the "centripetal" forms of kinship arrangement referred to earlier. Self-interest is of course not the same as selfishness, and when circumstances and inclinations permit, Bang Chaners can become among the most generous and hospitable of people (and in no sense paradoxically). Rarely have I seen, for example, people derive so much genuine pleasure from doing favors for others. In fact, these are among the first things that one notices about them: free agents helping others—but also ignoring them—when they see fit.

[11] This phrasing here in terms of *reciprocal benefits* is in the villagers' idiom, not mine.

[12] It is not insignificant that nowhere in Thai folklore does one find a recognition of possible conflict between the motives of self-interest and family obligation or of any moral lesson to be drawn from it; that is, there are no stories of a parent sacrificing himself for his children, or of children for their parents or, for that matter, of any moral value at all in self-sacrifice. On the other hand, one does find stories of individuals in conflict over which of two self-satisfying alternatives to select. In *Khun Chang and Khun Phaen*, for example, Wan Thong, the inconstant lover, could not make up her mind between love and wealth, and eventually was slain because of her indecision, the moral being that the person who cannot make up his mind deserves nothing.

On a more realistic level, one rarely finds anyone in Bang Chan being condemned for self-interest—the mother who abandons her children or the gallivanting husband—although one very frequently does encounter sympathy for those who suffer, the sympathy being elicited by the person or the fact of suffering, not the cause. The majority of Bang Chaners generally consider the motives of the self-interested party as the person's own business. This concern with sympathy (*sonsaan*) for those in difficulty, and simultaneous indifference to the source of their problem, has deep roots in Buddhist doctrine and should not be glossed over.

To have compassion (*mettaa* and *karunaa*) is among the noblest of Buddhist virtues. It is at one time a kindly expression of concern with others and a recognition of—or coming to terms with—what is considered intrinsic to the human situation. "Life is suffering" is the first of Buddhism's Four Noble Truths. However, since such suffering is intrinsic, there is little to be gained by assigning blame for it. Equally important, villagers assume that a person who suffers may well have brought it upon himself. The other person, acting in his own natural self-interest, may have simply been an agent or catalyst. His motives are his own business because they will eventually contribute, for better or worse, to his own denouement. The dynamics of these attitudes are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

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fundamentals of that structure or of the ultimate values upon which it is based. In a very real sense, the educated group is a class with a vested interest. Consequently it is conservative and pragmatic rather than radical and speculative . . .

The closest approximation to a psychological literature resulting from these fundamental intellectual orientations are religious and secular didactic essays, public school texts on morality, self-help or "peace of mind" tracts, and satirical or didactic fiction and poetry. (Mosel 1961 provides an excellent discussion of contemporary Thai poetry.)

Addressed to the reading public at large, these writings do not purport to be concerned with any particular group or class of Thai society: peasants, Bangkokians, Northeasterners, or others. Since they are for the most part written by the educated elite, however, they tend to reflect their authors' interests and standards. To what extent their standards differ from those held by peasants is difficult to determine with precision, although impressionistically it would seem that in psychological questions the educated elite give considerably more attention to the importance of social forms, the desirability of pleasing others, and also reveal a greater sense of compulsiveness, achievement, and social uneasiness than do peasants. Villagers simply seem more relaxed and self-accepting. However, these differences are very much a matter of degree. A Bang Chan child who learns about proper modes of behavior from *Sombad Khɔɔŋ Phuu Dii*, discussed below, may not have the same compulsion nor experience the same pressures to implement his studies as does the child of the Ministry of Education official who wrote the text. However, he thoroughly understands the teachings, their relevance and importance; knowing them is part of being Thai. A few illustrations will provide some of the flavor of these writings.

One of Thailand's most famous men of letters is M. R. Khukrit Pramoj, a publisher, editor, author, lecturer, and recently, movie actor. Educated in England and a member of the royalty, he is known to most Westerners as a kind of Siamese equivalent of Henry R. Luce, but to most Thai (although to no more than a handful of Bang Chaners, the majority having never even heard his name) he is known for his all-around knowledge of human affairs. His most popular work is *Panhaa Pracamwan*, or *Problems of Everyday Life*, a multi-volumed set of dialogues based on a column he wrote for his own newspaper in which he answers questions from hypothetical individuals who have "written" for advice on problems of ordinary living. These problems concern such matters as how to handle one's jealousy, how to treat those below and above one in the hierarchy, and how to control one's feelings of spleen and anger.

The following excerpt from volume iv of these essays (1952: 337–339) is not only representative of Khukrit's thinking, but bespeaks a

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need. The problem is that we really do not know, although comparative data from primatology (Yerkes 1943, Kroeber 1948: 27–29 and 60–61) clearly suggest that play belongs to the former category. If this is indeed the case it would imply that play is subject to the same degree of cultural influence, channeling, and socialization as are hunger, sex, and aggression, but can no more be fully obliterated than can these needs. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that this reasoning is correct, then the compensatory "escape" and "regressive" functions attributed to play by the authors noted above would not be at all unreasonable: play might well come to serve as an escape from adult reality in the same way that food sometimes serves as an escape from sexual anxiety or sex from food anxiety (Holmberg 1950). However, the point is that these are not the primary or typical functions of these needs, but secondary and defensive ones; although significant, they hardly comprise the necessary conditions for their being. If this approach is valid, we would be considerably wiser in our present state of knowledge (the Protestant Ethic and its intellectual extensions notwithstanding) to direct our attention to identifying the varying forms of play from culture to culture rather than to dwell on its secondary, compensatory functions.

Whatever its ultimate motivational basis, there is no doubting either the spontaneity or ingenuousness with which Bang Chaners turn social situations into occasions for play. For the most part they seem prompted in these situations by the simple desire to have a good time rather than to affect others in a socially pointed way, that is, their humor is not typically aimed at being sarcastic, didactic, or even exhibitionistic, although the person who excels at being funny is quickly recognized as such and is to an extent admired.[7] There is, in the negative sense noted earlier, an element of interpersonal effect operating here: comedy is a technique which almost by definition reduces the potentiality for face-to-face conflict. However, the villagers' play seems aimed primarily at satisfying personalistic function: their *individual* needs for pleasure and amusement.

The forms that these play activities take are numerous.[8] Perhaps their

[7] In the more explicitly institutionalized forms of comedy—*likes* (folk dramatic shows) or newspaper and magazine cartoons—these aims do come into play and often assume extreme, sometimes even biting, proportions. However, this is the comparatively safe world of theatre and "literature." Among themselves, in the world of face-to-face contact, villagers are considerably more gentle (or less sophisticated) and do not focus explicitly on such purposes.

[8] We will be concerned primarily with the forms of play, not its content. For whatever reason, humor and comedy seem to be the last refuge of what is genuinely private in a culture. Intercultural translations may succeed in communicating the manifest content of another people's humor, but they so frequently miss its intent that the result is either perplexity or disappointment ("Yes, and what happens then?").

The dangers of trying to share humor interculturally were perhaps never brought home better than when I tried to get the villagers' reaction to a story that received

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since even the most novel activities eventually become routine or stale, it is obviously impossible for all one's hours to be animated with *sanug*. From a total time perspective, many of the villagers' activities are of course either "sanug-fully" fallow or "sanug-fully" short-lived. To a large extent, this paradox is resolved *subjectively* by the short-term time perspective of the villagers. This is the second major point to be noted about *sanug*, that is, *sanug* reflects a more generalized tendency on the part of the villagers to concern themselves with activities that require only brief time commitments or whose effects are immediately forthcoming. Bang Chaners are not an impatient people in an active, negative sense, but they do have difficulty in attending to tasks that demand from them a sense of compulsiveness or staying power. They will often drop demanding tasks right in the middle once they have recognized that the work is taking longer than originally expected. What is striking is that they will do this with apparently no sense of frustration over not having fulfilled their aims and with no regret over having wasted their time. It is as if their original purposes had simply become irrelevant, and they had gone on to other things. This is precisely the attitude, for example, surrounding the construction of the unusable road referred to earlier leading from the Minburi Highway to the Bang Chan school. After devoting considerable labor to building the high mound that would form the foundation of the road, villagers lost interest when they were unable to obtain funds for its surfacing. Since no one was ever interested in maintaining it, the road now lies in the middle of a rice field, rutted and pitted; much of the foundation has sunk back to the level of the adjacent fields. However, no villager has ever considered the road a fiasco or "folly"; it was just something done in the past and has since been forgotten. The road project might be revived in the future, but from the villagers' point of view that too is irrelevant. The point is that *sanug*, with its emphasis on novelty and diversion, is expressive of this same underlying time orientation. In the villagers' way of thinking, no activity is really worth doing unless it has the potentiality for fun.

Another expression of the villagers' concern with play, related in some respects to what will be discussed in the next section, is their preoccupation with humorous *topics* of conversation. For the most part, they enjoy hearing and telling stories with a "banana peel" twist: of a husband who is caught by his wife sleeping with another woman; of an individual who, through his failure to take heed, is cheated out of his money. Such stories of course always concern other people, not those immediately present. Too, stories that combine whimsy and the supernatural—for example, of a "super-dog" that can find buried treasure or foretell the future—elicit laughter, although often with a tinge of apprehension that the stories may be true. However, what is most impressive about these and similar stories is the amount of time given to them.

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521 522 538 The sociological context of a story-telling is probably what is most important here. Bang Chan is a community where other than cultivating the single rice crop and attending to daily household chores and religious activities, the villagers realistically have little else to do but talk to each other. This is clearly not an inevitable attribute of the peasant condition, but it is true of Bang Chan where little attention is given to such creative leisure activities as craftsmanship, music, and art, and where there is little occupational specialization. In fact, probably more time is given to gossiping than to any other single waking activity except daydreaming. Bang Chaners talk of many things, serious as well as lighthearted: the price of rice, religion, gambling, the doings of "big people," family disputes, and the like. However, by far one of the largest segments of their total conversational repertoire is given over to "funny" stories. Of course, no story is ever *exclusively* humorous in nature; all communication is inherently multidimensional, and even the funniest story has a substantive, non-humorous message. However, if stories may be judged by their behavioral effects (laughter) irrespective of their intellectual content, then the function of a major part of Bang Chan gossip is amusement.[10]

538 154 The motivations for the selection of banana peel type stories are more complex. In part, the choice seems prompted by a "there but for the grace of God go I . . . " mentality. As suggested earlier, Bang Chaners have a keenly developed sense of the possible: to them, this is a world where anything, not only the probable or the predictable, can happen. The banana peel story, with its emphasis on the painfully ludicrous and extreme, is a perfect representation of such an uncertain world. Its beauty is

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[123] [114] [126] [10] During the early stage of field work, I attempted to do systematic naturalistic observations of these gossip groups. The purpose was simply to identify the kinds of topics uppermost in the villagers' minds and the modes of interaction that most frequently developed during the sessions; it was hoped that the latter information might be related to the psychological test materials of the discussants. As a precisely designed and executed project, the effort, however, was dropped after a short time. For one thing, it was too difficult for two observers to record the *simultaneous* verbal and kinesthetic interaction of *several* people without the aid of a self-powered tape recorder and with the added burden of having to strain the material through the translation process. The task was further complicated by the fact that the membership of these groups continually changed as people would leave and enter the conversations. Also the groups would often break down into smaller sub-groups. Most important was the sheer multidimensionality of the conversation: any one utterance could simultaneously be funny, aggressive, boastful, carry practical information, etc. However, enough information was culled from these early attempts and later less ambitious ones to prompt the statements presented here. It is this writer's observation that one of the reasons behind the success of so much of the "small group" research conducted in the United States is that the groups studied have been *problem solving* or *task-oriented*, rather than simple gossip groups. The highly functional nature of the former has provided built-in constraints on the freedom of action permitted the discussants, and has made observational problems comparatively easier to deal with.

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that it is simply a "story," a description of the plight of other people, not the self. The story-teller or listener has the pleasure of a vicarious experience, but none of the pain of the real life situation. He can laugh over his good fortune in not being the person who was cheated out of his money or who was caught philandering by his wife. On the negative side, these stories also serve as a means by which the participants can express, through identification and projection, some of their own hostilities. The veil of humor provides in fact the ideal dress for hostility: one can be completely unabashed about expressing one's feelings (of wanting to steal, say, or wanting to humiliate), since what is expressed, in a form so exaggerated as to be acceptable, is simply the feeling and not the act itself. The hostility is made even more acceptable by the fact that it is projected onto the person in the story rather than referred to ego himself. In these terms, the telling of these stories probably does have something of the cathartic function cited earlier in the chapter: aggressions and hostilities that are otherwise kept under careful control are here permitted to emerge not only painlessly, but with a bit of relish. Finally, some of the laughter at these stories is probably also based on the feelings of embarrassment evoked in listeners. This is similar to the "there but for the grace of God . . ." motive but is different in that it is not based on personal identification with the person who suffers but rather on a diffuse feeling of discomfort over the expression of aggression—aggression toward anybody. There is embarrassment over things not being as they should be, over one's moral universe being temporarily out of joint. Also, the laughter is probably symptomatic of the listener's uneasiness as he becomes aware that the hostilities portrayed in the story are strikingly similar to those he himself harbors toward others. Embarrassed about his own aggressive impulses, he assuages them with laughter.

The motives for focusing on whimsical topics of conversation are less recondite and defensive than the above. Stories of the type describing "super-dogs" who find buried treasure are told because they are at the same time such outrageous and yet gentle distortions of reality. It is the juxtaposition of incongruous elements that is so appealing here. In ordinary Thai thought, for example, the dog is generally considered to be one of the most inconsequential and worthless of creatures. He is tolerated for his ability to warn of strangers and dispose of refuse, but nothing remotely approximating the feeling of "man's best friend" is associated with him. For such a lowly creature to be the sudden possessor of miraculous power is just too foolish. An elephant, monkey, or cobra perhaps, but not a dog.[11] Only "uncivilized" forest people would accept such a story. Yet, because the dog is such a familiar part of one's environment and also a living creature

[11] Doubt would exist for these creatures too, but because of their mythological and historical significance it would be somewhat tempered.

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("Who knows what he was in earlier lives and what powers he brought with him into this one?"), there is enough reality about the tale to make people want to listen. Moreover, it is wish-fulfilling fantasy; people laugh because reality has been outraged, but with a lingering desire that it really could be.

The kinds of stories outlined above do not exhaust the villagers' stock of conversational humor. There are also tall stories without the supernatural touch, broad burlesques, "dirty" jokes,[12] and the countless epigrams that work their way into almost any conversation; the last are not so much topics of conversation as they are means of punctuating a point. However, enough has been said to indicate that in its cognitive stylization and social psychological purposes, Bang Chan humor is not too different from Western humor. It is rather the content, frequency, and evaluation of the humor that is so distinctive. That the content should be distinctive is of course self-evident, since all humor is rooted in the implicit and familiar premises of workaday, cultural life. In fact the very essence of a joke is seeing the culturally familiar in an entirely new light. This may help to explain, incidentally, why it is always so painfully self-defeating to try "to explain" the content of a joke: its entire effect is dependent on the listener's implicit

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[12] Sexual and scatological humor in Bang Chan pose some special problems. On the one hand, because villagers take such a matter-of-fact approach to sex, there are actually few jokes and stories that aim explicitly at being titillating or risqué. For most Bang Chaners, sex is something to be experienced and enjoyed in private, not snickered about barracks-style; there is no *sanug* in *talking* about sex (although there may be in playing with tabooed words, especially if cleverly done). Also, villagers seem to lack any interest in lewdness for its own sake. Not only Bang Chan, but Thai culture in general, is striking for its relative absence of attempts to edify sex: there is nothing in Thai literature or art, for example, approximating the exaggerated bawdiness of Rabelais or the graphic sensuality of the kind of sculpture found at Khajuraho and Konarak in India.

On the other hand, sexual situations are very often used as vehicles for portraying the foibles and stupidities of people. Villagers particularly enjoy stories of individuals of either sex who devise ways for seducing the unsuspecting, or of individuals who manage to outwit their spouses while philandering with their lovers; the more complex their machinations, the more amusing the stories. However, it is the social psychological, not the sexual, dimensions of these tales that form the major bases of their appeal.

Finally, it should be noted that villagers tend to distinguish between what could be called "genital" and "anal" modes of humor. The latter type has considerably fewer taboos associated with it. Thus, whereas most villagers would avoid going into descriptive detail in reporting the physical aspects of a tale of sexual conquest, they would have few qualms about discussing (and often with acoustical detail) such things as people who pass air in public or who otherwise get themselves into compromising anal situations. (Interestingly, J. Marvin Brown in his linguistic work with Thai informants, often including female university students, reports in a personal communication that he encountered difficulty in obtaining the various Thai terms for sexual organs and acts, but that the terms for anal and excretory behavior were given with little hesitation.)